

Smooth Horizon of the Verb Love by ninety

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: 80s lesbians...iconic, Aged-Up Character(s), Angst, Angst with a Happy Ending, Coming Out, F/F, First Love, Friends to Lovers, It's a punk!max cheerleader!el au, Minor Dustin Henderson/Lucas Sinclair, Minor Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Minor Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Minor Will Byers/Mike Wheeler, Period-Typical Homophobia, Period-Typical Racism, Sexual Themes, Slow Burn, They're in high school so, no actual smut

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Summary:

“I bet you real money, or rides, or smokes— whatever you want, that you can’t get Jane to sleep with you by the end of next semester.” Lucas looks almost proud of himself when he steps back, glancing over his shoulder at the group of girls wielding pom-poms, seemingly flying. Seemingly touching the sun.

“You fall in love, you lose.”

Title from the poem of the same name by Nicole Brossard.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

I SAW SOME OF MY MUTUALS TALKING ABOUT A PUNK!MAX AND CHEERLEADER!EL AU AND I WANTED TO BRING IT TO LIFE! THIS HASN'T BEEN BETA'D SO BEAR WITH ME. I LOVE YOU ALL (especially the lesbians reading this i love you the most)!

September 1988

"I think the only thing that would be more cliché," Max brushes a few pebbles from where they're trapped in the skin of her palms and lifts an orange flame to her lips. A piece of her hair falls in front of her face and she blows it away with a puff of smoke. "Is if he was on the football team."

Lucas— for a second— throws his head back and sighs, content with imagining, before letting out a light laugh to accompany his friend's. He extends a grabbing hand to retrieve their shared cigarette. Max scowls but hands it over. "He wouldn't last a day on the football team," Lucas exhales, letting the smoke blow back into Max's face. He licks his lips, tasting the familiar orange soda flavor of Max's chapstick. She's used the same kind since middle school.

"Are you sure?" She asks, sarcastically. She brushes her hair out of her eyes this time with her right hand. It's shorter now than it used to be. Only coming to rest in waves on her shoulders, but it's thick and tangles annoyingly. She throws a smirk Lucas' way. "I heard trumpet players have a pretty mean punt."

"You're just jealous, Mayfield," Lucas lifts his head from where it lies, disgustingly, on the ground next to a pile of chewed gum and a shoe with a hole in the bottom. They'd found it there— under the visiting bleachers— freshman year. They'd made up a story then of who it could've belonged to. His name was Gary, and he'd OD'ed in '76.

They took his lifeless, dirty body, but left his shoe. Lucas forgets how they'd explained the unusually large hole, but it hasn't moved since, and they keep coming back to make sure of it. And to smoke.

"Yeah, Sinclair? Of what?" Max shrinks, nervously, taking one last drag of the cigarette and stubbing it out rigidly against the bottom of her boot before Lucas can protest. She crosses a pair of intensely freckled arms then, trying to ignore her heart rate.

Lucas smiles.

Fuck yo-

"Of his relationship with Jane Hopper," Lucas boasts, although quiet. Like it's a confession and a secret wrapped up in one with a ribbon on top. Max wants to spit in the dirt and rub the mud into his teeth.

"If there's *one thing* I'm *not* it's jealous of Mike Wheeler," Max scoffs, trying to sound as disinterested as possible. She prays her voice doesn't waver. She prays the red on her cheeks can be explained by her fair skin in the sun, but Lucas knows her. He knows her better than anyone.

"Cmon, Max. Even I've been jealous of Mike before," He stretches his arms above his head, scratching the strip of skin exposed just beneath his shirt at the motion. Max winces. "He's— okay he's not cool. Um...he's smart. That must've been it."

"Maybe *you* have it bad for Jane." Max teases, pushing two fingers into Lucas' side, causing him to yelp in a mixture of pain and pink, tickled laughter.

He gets back at her by pinching her forearm, just where her pushed-up sleeve meets her elbow. She squeals.

"Yeah sure, lemme just drop my own crush problems. There they go, out the fucking window," He rants, animatedly pretending to throw a ball of *problems* through a windowpane. Max swears she hears glass shatter. "You need to own up to *your* problem, Max it's the first step."

Max withdraws, slightly, rolling her eyes to the west where the sun has already begun sinking in the sky. Just enough for the light to

shine across Lucas' eyes and for him to squint in the way he has since they'd met 4 years ago. It makes her insides warm in a way that makes her squirm. It's not romantic, no, but nostalgic. The line doesn't sound rude to anyone else's ears but hers, and that's only because anger isn't her friend, but she's *working on it* for the good of the dumb kids she calls friends. So she takes a deep breath before falling into Lucas' side, her chin digging sharply into the meat of his shoulder. "I really don't have a problem."

"You may be my friend, and I *may* love you," Lucas pets her hair and plants a kiss on top of her head. "But that's bullshit."

"Yeah, okay," Max rolls her eyes again but drops it.

The pair springs up at the sound of loud voices across the football field, brushing debris of the backs of their pants and clearing the air of any lingering plumes. Pretending like they'd been on their way to class and had just stumbled and fallen into hiding was often their only defense against curious faculty. Lucas acts like he's been shot when his eyes widen and his mouth drops open. "I have an idea."

"Shoot," Max squints through the openings of the bleacher stairs, making sure they're in the clear before stepping out from behind the metal beams, skateboard under her arm. Lucas lightly jogs to catch up to her stride. He's about 4-5 inches taller than her now, but her legs are long and her stare and the rips in her clothes are intimidating. With all the extra room due to people getting out of her way, she walks faster than most people skip.

"How about a little wager," Lucas proposes, coming to a stop a ways away from the sidelines of the football field used for practices. Its current occupants: varsity cheer. Max slows down, reflexively placing the cigarette she'd pulled from her shirt pocket behind her ear like she'd been caught. "Wanna hear it?"

"I already said shoot," Max raises an eyebrow, but shuts her mouth and waits for Lucas to continue.

Her arms cross again, and Lucas thinks it's almost laughable how small she looks from his perspective. Though he'd never say so, due to past threats consisting, vaguely, of ripping off certain parts of his

body that he'd really rather keep.

"I bet you *real* money, or rides, or smokes— whatever you want, that you can't get Jane to sleep with you by the end of next semester." Lucas looks almost proud of himself when he steps back, glancing over his shoulder at the group of girls wielding pom-poms, seemingly flying. Seemingly touching the sun.

Max almost laughs. Her eyes bug in her head and she has to hold back a scoff no one smaller than 8 feet tall has ever dared to let slip. It would be too much, too forceful, too loud for a "lady of her size" as her stepmother puts it. Instead, she thrusts a heavy hand into the air in front of her and stands tall, holding her chin high.

"Hold on, one rule." Lucas shakes a finger in her direction, before stiffly spinning around and circling her in the dirt. Quite dramatically. Quite like Lucas.

He seems to almost be pondering over what to make the rule himself, and Max opens her mouth to intervene when he shushes her quickly.

"You fall in love, you lose."

It isn't a hard rule. It shouldn't be, but Max finds her arm growing weak and her fingers twitching to drop. It may be her brain seeing into the future, as it often does, but it also might just be her natural instinct to be wary of promises and conditions. She can never tell. She exhales, reinforcing her posture before looking Lucas in the eye.

"Not for nothing, Sinclair" She spits into her palm and offers it back out to Lucas who in turn, spits in his own palm and takes his friend's hand roughly. A spit pact is just as unbreakable as an ink one. If not, even more. "But *you're* gonna lose."

"I guess we'll see, but for now," He suddenly sounds rushed, pulling Max into his side by her shoulders and twirling them both around swiftly to face the sun and, beautifully, the music. "You have a cheerleader to stalk."

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

I tore through a bowl of lucky charms while editing this so if it sucks blame the damn leprechaun. I hope this satisfies the lesbians because I only do it for you.

If you wanna immerse yourself, listen to Peaches by In The Valley Below while reading this chapter. I did.

Max approaches the football field with a diminishing spring in her step.

It's not that she's nervous— no. She just doesn't have any idea what to say. To anyone, most of the time. Except Lucas. She can always fuck with Lucas.

Max had never been great at making friends and or keeping acquaintances. The best friends she's ever made were the three or four she'd managed to reel in during her eighth-grade year when she was new to Hawkins, and boys thought her sun-kissed skin was pretty. Dustin and Lucas were first, the two fighting for her unfortunately— as realized later— very very lesbian hand. Lucas stole a kiss at their winter semi-formal the very same year. Dustin thought he'd won until she came out to both of them through teary fingers the following summer. They all grew closer after that somehow.

She'd met Jane in 8th grade the day after winter break.

And Mike. And Will. She'd met them all.

"This is Mike, and his girlfriend, Jane, and Will Byers..."

Mike was skinny, about her height with a stunning full head of black hair comparable to a mushroom, and had a scowl on his face that could compete with her own. It only seemed to diminish when the tiny girl with short brown hair and huge dark eyes (darker than dark, almost nothing), whose hand he was holding, would tug on his arm

and plant a wet kiss on his cheek. It was disgusting then because they were *shy* , but only a little afraid. It's even more so now that they aren't either.

Max had been holding hands with Lucas, her heart tugging on her throat telling her strongly that she was *pretending*, that she was a *fraud*. That was before she'd learned to listen.

It was amazing to think she'd even kept him at all.

Will was the smallest of them all, Max remembers because she'd heard a lot about Will Byers. And how he always looked like he'd been run over by a truck. He stood on flat feet, back hunched and fingertips ghosting Mike's side. Max thought it was weird that he tagged along with Hawkins Middle's own married couple, but there was something about the way he would sigh at Mike sometimes and stand a little straighter when Mike would glance at him with worried eyes. Max ignored it. For a few years.

Will was still small for a guy, standing at a threatening 5'6 even at the ripe old age of 17.

On days like today, when the sun is shining low, almost touching the horizon, Max will often find him hunched over on the bleachers, blending stick in hand pretending to not know marching band practice is going on on the east end of the field. Pretending he isn't sketching 30 different angles of Mike Wheeler.

"How's it going, Byers?"

Will slams his sketchbook shut with graphite stained fingers, straightening his back with a nervous smile. "Um hey— hi Max."

Max sits a step down from him, boots coming to rest underneath her knees as she leans back and looks up. "Anything new in Will's world?"

"Not—" He twists his body around to face her, face lighting up at the realization that just beyond her head was the view he'd wanted anyway. If she'd done that on purpose, no one would know. Will certainly wouldn't ask. "Really, no. You?"

"I'm gonna let you in on a little secret, my friend," Max leans in close, urging Will to do the same with the wave of her hand. "I'm on a mission."

"What kind of mission," Will looks suddenly intrigued and pulls his sketchbook tighter to his chest, hoping to lean even closer.

Max covers her mouth with one hand, "A gay mission. And I need your help."

"I'm in," Will immediately whispers, sending them both into small fits of knowing laughter.

It'd be insane to anyone but them, but they have a bond no one at Hawkins High School can really relate to. They weren't the closest of friends but they were *out to each other* and for Max that was enough. It's one thing to be gay around people that aren't, but a totally different (and amazing) thing to be gay around other gay people in a town that'll all but kill you for both. Will Byers was a blessing.

Max looks around at that, noticing that marching band was done for the day and everyone was starting to disperse, which meant cheer would soon be done too. It sent Max into a panic when she saw Mike jogging over to where she now sat with Will to her left. She waves a hand of dismissal in Will's general direction, but he's already sitting up, eagerness seeping from lips drawn up in a tight smile.

Before Mike can even make it to the fence surrounding the track he's intercepted by Jane, who slams into his side and attacks his lips in a fever Max would only dream of committing to a dripping ice cream cone.

She scoffs at the same time Will hums a disapproving note.

"Any cool ones today, Will?" Mike's hair against the sun forms a kind of halo around his head. Max can almost see the cartoon hearts floating out of Will's ears. She feigns a gag.

"Just some dumb drawings of the trees and stuff, as usual," Will lies through his teeth. Max seems to be the only one with bullshit goggles because Jane perks up with his mention of landscapes.

"I'm sure they're beautiful, Will. You should show us tonight when we're out of here. It'll be late, around 10 as usual." Jane leans against Mike's shoulder, their staggering heights shocking to the eye.

Max can't look away from them until Mike's hand is on Jane's hip and she has to.

"It's so nice to see you as well, Maxine! Feels like it's been a million years." Jane's voice jumps, full of surprise, but it's still genuine. Her eyes find Max's when she lifts her head and she smiles. "Are you coming to the game tonight?"

Her teeth are full of lavender sprigs—

"I'm not really a football person," Max shakes her head, not breaking eye contact. That is until Jane smiles again and for some reason, she feels she has to. Again. Max tries to tell herself it isn't because Jane is *pretty*. *Home by eight* with soft pink cheeks pretty. Never.

Will stares on at their interaction with a confused expression. Glancing back and forth awkwardly from Max to Jane to Mike, and back again. Mike opens his mouth to intervene before Jane cuts him off.

"Then come to Deena's after and bring Lucas, we have enough room." Jane's eyes widen like she'd just had a revelation, and Max remembers her mission at the sight. Her mind clicks into gear in the same heartbeat, already visualizing a skateboard friendly path to the diner. "Will is definitely going, right Will?"

Will's tennis-match-like concentration breaks and he stumbles over his words, coughing up an affirmative noise. Mike does the same with his eyebrows drawn together.

"It's not a big game or anything so like," Mike scratches at his neck, in a trying-to-figure-out-how-to-be-passive-aggressive-without-actually-expressing-it kind of way. In a Mike way. It doesn't work. "You don't have to come if you can't. I'll let Lucas know—

"I'll come," Max agrees quickly. She's confident now that if this was her way into Jane's circle, with the invitation *from* the girl herself,

this couldn't possibly get any easier. "On one condition,"

They all raise eyebrows, Jane's looking exceedingly sculpted, the dark blue barrette holding bob-length wisps of hair from her face almost mimics the shape.

"I get to sit next to Jane."

Max swears the shine of Jane's lip gloss could blind a pilot when her mouth drops open just a bit, and a soft giggle falls out.

Will smiles. Mike doesn't. His sneakers scratch the dirt in an impulse to *walk* and Max can tell, so she lets them turn to leave, limbs and torsos tangled haphazardly, borderline protectively together.

"10 sharp, Maxine!" Jane calls back with a wave, pom-pom strapped to her wrist shaking as she does so. Max swallows a wad of spit.

"What the hell was that," Will finally asks when they're gone, stunned by the scene that had just unfolded in front of them both.

"My gay mission," Max exhales, pulling the cigarette she'd forgotten she had stored behind her ear from its hidden home, and sticking it between her lips.

Author's Note:

catch me on tumblr @ kaspbrck. love u to bits